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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000332

SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM, NEA, NEA/ARPI
SECDEF FOR OSD, OUSD (P)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2015
TAGS: [AF](#) [ETRD](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [MAS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: ASD RODMAN MEETING WITH UAE INFORMATION MINISTER

¶1. (C) Summary: During a January 12 meeting with UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, ASD Peter Rodman discussed Iraq,s upcoming election and its role in achieving stability. Sheikh Abdullah shared concerns about Sunni participation in the election and representation in a future Shi,a-dominated government. He said the UAE remains focused on Iranian meddling in Iraq, and shares U.S. skepticism about Syrian President Bashar,s ability to shut down the sanctuaries for Iraq,s insurgents inside Syria. Sheikh Abdullah said the positive signals from Washington after Mahmoud Abbas, election have given new hope to the Palestinians, and he urged greater U.S. engagement. He said to expect even more positive editorial changes at Dubai-based Al Arabiya television, and he confirmed that the recent Saudi-Bahrain spat had not affected the UAE,s desire to talk with the U.S. about a Free Trade Agreement. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On the margins of the first U.S.-UAE Joint Military Commission, Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ASD/ISA), joined by

Ambassador and party, called on Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Information January 12. Sheikh Abdullah was joined by Yousef Al Otaiba, special advisor to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Iraq election

13. (C) Sheikh Abdullah asked ASD Rodman for a readout of his meeting a day earlier with Dubai Crown Prince (and titular UAE Minister of Defense) Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid (MBR). ASD Rodman said MBR had expressed concern about Iraq's Sunni population in the run-up to the January 30 election. ASD Rodman said the election has enormous value, but the Sunnis are faced with a dilemma. While they will no longer dominate Iraq, they can be full participants in a benign political system. Delaying the elections would not accomplish anything because the Sunnis would still be faced with the same dilemma. ASD Rodman noted that the Shi'a and Kurds were reaching out to the Sunnis to reassure them that there is a place for them. He said he hoped the Sunnis would make the right decision because Iraq cannot survive without the coalescence of all groups. Despite intimidation by extremists, "polls show that 80-85% of the population want to vote," and the U.S. still believes the majority of Iraqis want to participate in the political process, and the U.S. will do its best to provide maximum security. The election will be fully legitimate.

14. (C) Will the Sunnis have a chance to vote, Sheikh Abdullah asked? ASD Rodman said there have been some difficulties setting up sufficient polling stations, and there was also the problem of intimidation. Sheikh Abdullah inquired about voting modalities, and whether the U.S. sees a single party dominating the future national assembly. ASD Rodman said that he was impressed by the inclusiveness of the so-called Shi'a list, indicating a desire for national unity. It is more a coalition than a party. ASD Rodman expressed confidence that the election would produce a balanced government. After the election, the politics will begin. The new presidency council and others elected will look for balance and make room for Sunnis to join the political process. They will also have the task of drafting a new constitution. He added that the Kurds have the incentive to be inclusive, as do the Shi'a. If the Shi'a win a majority of seats in the national assembly and the country then fragments, their victory will be hollow. "We have to provide a structure and incentive for the Sunni to defeat their own extremists."

Iranian influence in Iraq

15. (C) Sheikh Abdullah asked about Iranian influence on the Iraq election, and noted that some of the candidates on the predominant Shi'a list had lived in Iran. ASD Rodman said that the list supported by Ayatollah Al Sistani was a list of Iraqis, and none of the Shi'a factions in Iraq wants to be perceived as being a puppet of Iran.⁸ The Iran-Iraq war demonstrated that the Shi'a of Iraq were Iraqis, not a tool of Iran. "We share UAE's view that if this were another Iran, this would be a disaster--but that is the least likely outcome." Sheikh Abdullah recalled a statement by Shi'a candidate Abdul Aziz Al Hakim about the need for Iraq to repay Iran \$100 billion in war reparations. ASD Rodman said he understood Sheikh Abdullah's concern, but added that the U.S. view was that Iraqis are Iraqi, and that in a democratic Iraq, the Shi'a will be a majority who coexist with Kurds and Sunnis. Iran will try to disrupt Iraq to prevent it from becoming stable, but a sense of national identity will pull Iraqis together. If the U.S. can help Iraqis consolidate their institutions, we could have a positive influence.

16. (C) Sheikh Abdullah expressed concern about the potential rise of a Shi'a extremist party in Iraq, similar to the small but influential Hezbollah in Lebanon. The radical Shi'a Hizbullah in Lebanon is disproportionately influential

with Muslims throughout the Middle East, and he is concerned that a similar phenomenon could occur with Hizbullah in Iraq.

ASD Rodman said the extremism currently on display in Iraq is Sunni, and the disruption is being caused by former Saddam Hussein regime elements and foreign fighters backed by Zarqawi. Most Shi'a are moderates who seek to participate in the political process. Sheikh Abdullah asked what would happen if only a small percentage of Sunnis were elected to the national assembly, or if those Sunnis elected were political unknowns inside the Sunni community. ASD Rodman said there are well-known candidates, such as Iraqi President Al Yawar, who is a tribal leader. The national assembly will have legitimacy. The U.S. is training the army and police. Although the struggle will continue, the U.S. believes the moderate Iraqis will be strengthened by the creation of a legitimately elected government, he said.

¶17. (C) Sheikh Abdullah asked whether voting on the basis of lists was perhaps a bad idea. ASD Rodman said some in the USG had concerns but the UN had determined that this was the simplest method to implement in a short period of time. Once the Iraqis draft a new constitution, it is open to them. They could introduce district elections as a way to ensure more stability.

Syria,s role

¶18. (C) Had the Syrians changed their policies vis--vis Iraq, Sheikh Abdullah asked? ASD Rodman said that the problem with Syria is that it is a place where the insurgents organize and raise money, and that Syrian Baathists are colluding. The infiltration of insurgents across the Syria-Iraq border is a symptom of the main problem, which is going on inside Syria with the collusion of the government. The U.S. is skeptical of President Bashar, even though he told A/S Burns and ASD Rodman last September that he supports the Iraqi government 100 percent. The fact is, several months later, the same activity is taking place, and Syria should be able to control, and is accountable for, what is going on inside its own borders. Deputy Secretary Armitage traveled to Damascus more recently to deliver the same message, ASD Rodman said. U.S. patience is wearing out. Bashar has to stop providing sanctuary for the insurgents. Bashar Al Asad is not in control, Sheikh Abdallah suggested, and the people around him are the old guard.

Palestinian election and the Roadmap

¶19. (C) In the wake of the Palestinian leadership elections, the signals from Washington have been quite positive, and have given the Palestinians new hope, Sheikh Abdullah said. When Mahmoud Abbas was Prime Minister, he did not get the backing he deserved, even though he was a moderate. We should not lose the opportunity we have with Abu Mazen this time around, Sheikh Abdullah asserted. ASD Rodman recalled President Bush's June 24, 2002, speech in which he stated that both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute have responsibilities, but that the Palestinian leadership was corrupt and tainted by its association with terrorism. When Arafat departed the scene, that opened up a new opportunity. Israel's Gaza disengagement plan is historic. There are now conditions on the ground that warrant us to plunge in and do things. Sheikh Abdullah nodded in agreement. ASD Rodman continued, This is clearly a moment when the conditions are right. Now is the time to engage. Sheikh Abdullah agreed and noted that everyone knew Arafat was corrupt. He said that Palestinians have to get their own state. We should not let extremists continue to use the Palestinian argument as a tool in other contexts, he added, alluding to terrorist actions elsewhere.

Review of JMC

¶10. (C) ASD Rodman also reviewed the deliberations that had

taken place at the January 11-12 Joint Military Commission (JMC). The JMC had very few complicated issues in the military sphere, which is an indication that the relationship is very strong. The one &vulnerability8 is the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), and the UAE side did not wish to discuss it at the JMC, preferring to raise it directly with the Embassy at a later time. ASD Rodman said that everywhere we are in the world we have a status of forces arrangement, and that we need to fix our dormant DCA with UAE.

Al Arabiya television

¶11. (C) ASD Rodman talked about his interview that morning with Dubai-based Al Arabiya television. Sheikh Abdullah said to expect more positive changes at the station. Many of the station's editorial staff had worked at Al Jazeera in the past and came to Al Arabiya with the &same mentality8 as one finds at Al Jazeera. Give Al Arabiya six more months to change, he asked. He said he &could not understand8 how the Qataris &allow8 Al Jazeera to broadcast what they do. The news department is &run by fundamentalists and Arab nationalists.8

FTA

¶12. (C) Sheikh Abdullah said the recent FTA dispute between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain was not &slowing down the UAE8 on its FTA plans. Sheikh Abdullah said the Saudis had larger problems but failed to solve them for many years. ASD Rodman said the U.S. appreciates the UAE's military cooperation, its help in Iraq and Afghanistan, its recent economic contribution to the earthquake/tsunami victims in Southeast Asia, and the fact that, like the U.S., it has a strategic interest in Iran. &We will do our best to show that we are a reliable ally,8 he said.

¶13. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

¶14. (U) ASD Rodman has approved this cable.
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